

## NEWSROOM

[Home](#) / [News](#) / [2021](#) / [April](#) / Four Questions With Brooke Covington

## FOUR QUESTIONS WITH BROOKE COVINGTON

## ENGLISH PROFESSOR TAKES ON NEW LEADERSHIP ROLES IN SERVICE AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT.

by [Brian McGuire](#) | April 14, 2021*Above: Brooke Covington**Read time: about 2 min*

Dr. Brooke Covington, assistant professor of [English](#), has been appointed to three roles that will make her a go-to for the scores of Christopher Newport students looking to make a difference in other peoples' lives. Her roles include academic director of the [Center for Community Engagement](#), director of the [Ferguson Fellowship for Social Entrepreneurship](#) and director of the [civic engagement and social justice minor](#). She took some time to answer our questions about her new duties and the importance of involvement in the lives of others.

**Why are service and civic engagement so important?**

A commitment to service and civic engagement stands at the core of the liberal arts and sciences education we hope to instill in students. Because of that, it is important for faculty and students to consider how they might use their course materials to build change-sustaining coalitions both on and off campus.

Incorporating service and civic engagement into course designs encourages students to think about their college education more holistically and their potential to make an impact beyond the safety of our classroom walls. In my mind, service and civic engagement are inextricable from one another. To be civic-minded is to rise to the call of service – to dedicate your time, your expertise and your voice to those issues that matter most not just to you but, more importantly, to the community as well.

**What are some of the ways you will help students realize their goals to help others?**

In each of these roles, I want to help students understand that strong community engagement projects must be community-driven and mutually beneficial. To cultivate and sustain such projects, students also need to be trained in coalition building, empathetic listening and critical reflection.

Beyond those strategies, I will also help students understand the use of participatory research methods, the ethical considerations associated with service learning and the ways in which writing acts as a vehicle for lasting social change. Perhaps most importantly, though, I am dedicated to student mentorship.

I show up for students – to listen to their thoughts, to support them through their struggles and to celebrate their triumphs.

**What are some of the challenges you see facing students who want to make the world a better place?**

Young people face several daunting challenges right now – beyond the detrimental effects of a global pandemic, this past year has also been plagued with an alarming rate of social justice and human rights violations. Admittedly, it is easy to feel paralyzed by these seemingly insurmountable problems; and yet what impresses me most about the students at Christopher Newport is their genuine desire to make positive change.

The biggest challenge many young people face, however, is figuring out where to begin. Our problems are monumental, and it can be difficult to identify where these problems exist in the smaller infrastructures of our own neighborhoods. The Center for Community Engagement can help in that respect, but what's important to remember is that community engagement needs and priorities must be co-created with and informed by the community, which requires time and genuine effort.

To be successful, the seeds of any social justice initiative must be planted in the community. Part of the center's mission is to support such initiatives by connecting students with local organizations and mentoring them through the process of ethically completing projects with the community. So, to anyone unsure of where or how to begin, please contact us at the center.

**Anything else you want students to know?**

I am deeply committed to listening to the concerns and priorities of local residents in hopes that, together, we can build lasting change.

There is so much to gain from a focus on community engagement at Christopher Newport. Community engagement relies on high-impact, immersive educational strategies that ask students to apply classroom knowledge to real-world settings where the stakes are higher and the ultimate goal is not just earning a letter on a transcript. I hope to help students and faculty realize that what we stand to gain from these strategies – both in the classroom and in the community – makes the effort worthwhile.

Covington teaches an array of writing and rhetoric courses. She holds a PhD from Virginia Tech.

---